

Inserted consonants in French slang derivatives : selection of non-etymological /l/ in travlo words

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Among the many constructed words of colloquial and slang French, still are a few impervious ones (1). Culprits : non-etymological consonants (NEC) placed between what appears to be a truncated base and a suffix. The most proficient, /t/, is only selected 30 % of the time, followed at 23 % by /l/. Here we explore the possibility that this alternance is motivated by a compromise between the Dissilimation Constraint (Plénat & Roché 2016's framework) and the possibility of phonological moorings from diachrony appending a |U| element to a Bare Elements Geometry (Ulfsbjorninn 2021) structure of /l/ .

- (1) a. *val-oché* /valɔʃ/ 'luggage' c. *moru-t-ier* /morytje/ 'cod fisher'
b. *congo-l-ais* /kɔ̃gole/ 'congo inhabitant' d. *lion-c-eau* /ljɔ̃fso/ 'lion cub'

Till today, French keeps a strong alternance between rounded vowels and the dental liquid in V__#C contexts (cf. 2ab), but also in verbs' themes (cf. 2cd, Bonami & Boyé 2003), and some singular/plural noun themes.

- (2) a. *fou(m)* /folle(f) /fu/fɔl/ 'crazy, mad' c. *résoudre* /resudr/ 'to solve'
b. *du (de le /də lə/)* /dy/ 'of.the_masc' d. *résolvent* /rezɔlv/ '(they) solve'

At the end of the 19th century, French bandit's slang "Argot" became the standard lower class vernacular in Paris. Its cryptic aspect was essential, hence developed numerous derivational processes and phonetics jumbling "games" to disguise words. Amongst the most famous ones, we can cite Louchéhem or Javanais. Another process was truncating words and appending a colloquial suffix. (cf. 1a). Some of these resuffixed truncated words (RTW) exhibit an NEC between the truncated base and the suffix.

It has been argued that these belong either to the consonantal epentheses, interfixes or infixes class by Roché (2015), however, dissimilation isn't always enough to justify selection of /l/, /k/, /b/, /m/ or /br/ over /t/. Our corpus is composed of 218 words mostly from argot dictionaries, but also a few from modern standard French such as demonyms *congolais* or adjective *hugolien*. Here we focus on the /l/ inserted NECs, which represent 47 words.

Structure

Since words that interest us were subjected to two transformation in a row, we think it best to keep this base-truncation-suffixed_form (B-T-S) relationship to identify them. Counting the number of syllable for each step gives 17 groups, with the 6 most proficient ones totalling up to 90 % of the corpus. Main groups include 212 (46.73%), 112 (12.15%), 323 (11.68%) and 223 (9.35 %). The main syllable structure include CVCV and CVCVC for the B, CVC and CCVC for the T, and CVCCV, CVCCVC and CCVCCV for the S.

- (3) a. *bureau* /byro/ > /byr/ > /byrlɛ̃g/ 'desk, office'
b. *travesti* /travesti/ > /trav/ > /travlo/ 'transvestite (denig.)'

Morphophonology

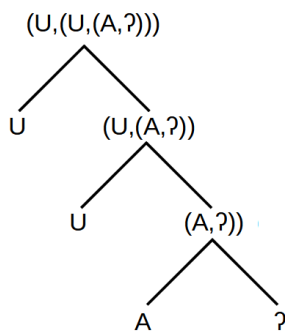
As explicited in Lexematic Morphology (Aronoff & Fudeman 2022), suffixes select the base on which they will attach, and trigger the necessary changes in theme selection and segments insertion to satisfy different constraints. Roché & Plénat (2016) sumerises them, and shows the prevalence of the Syllabation, Size and Dissimilation constraints on the phonological side, mostly Series in our case (that S has to belong to a series by the end) on the morphological side.

The dissimilation constraint (suffixes avoid word bases having similar segments to them close to the morphological boundary), changing the base (feminine theme, verbal theme) or inserting a segment. In Standard French, it has been shown that dissimilation works in close proximity with sonority, to produce an aesthetic optimal.

T last segment before /l/ is composed of 38 % of labials, 32 % of dorsals, 13 % of /o/ then 10 % of coronals and the rest of /a/, whereas the S first segment is 47 % of |U| (headed) segments, 43 % of |A| segments and 10 % of |l| segments, all vocalic (4 glides).

Diachrony & moorings

From late Latin whose /l/ realised in four flavours [l], [ʎ], [ɫ] and [ɮ] to French, only onset positions kept their consonantal values, all the rest lost it and merged with preceding vowels, into either /u/, /o/ or /ej/. We assume, following Pope (1934) (§389), that all /l/ flavours possessed an intrinsic |U| element, and following Backley (2011), that /l/ could have the value in (4, on the left). The "(U,U)" expresses the attractivity in /l/ for labials as well as dorsals (Ulfsbjorninn 2021), and the couple "(A,?)" authorises the possibility of lenition from "?" to "Ø", vocalising /l/ into /u/ or /o/ depending on the preceding vowel. High frequency words change less (Pagel *et al.* 2007), and French determiners *du* /dy/ 'of.PART.masc' and *au* /o/ 'at.masc' having a very high frequency, as much as examples in (2), keep the alternation between vocalic ((A,Ø) couple) and consonantal ((A,?) couple) alive in the phonological rules of the speakers.

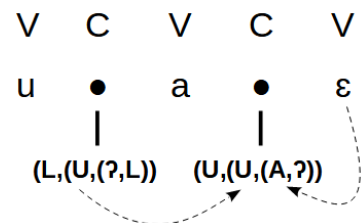


Anti-dissimilation & attractiveness

|U| element in /l/ keeps its value because of high frequency words, and 19th century constructions with /l/ attracted RTWs having entered the standard vocabulary giving precedent, modern situation with /o/, labial or dorsal end of word or morphological boundary, plays with dissimilation constraint in order to choose /l/ over /t/ as the NEC. Modern demonyms such as *Congo* > *congolais*, *Ougadougou* > *Ougalais*, *Diégo* (Madagascar) > *diégoalais* shows that /o/ could attract /l/, but it's in fact the velar of the T last syllable that attracts the NEC (as shown in 5). The suffix also attracts a segment that possess a |A| element, hence choosing /l/ as defined in (4):

(5) *Ougadougou* /ugadugu/ > */uga/- > */uga+ε/ > /ugale/

Contrary to standard French, we would argue that repair structures in Argot tend to prefer anti-dissimilatory effects, choosing segments that either augment disharmony or repeat similar segments at a close proximity.



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